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## There's a storm a 'brewing

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When Dr. Gene Fober and his wife walked out of a restaurant on Veterans Parkway March 1, 2007, in Columbus, Ga., they noticed dark, black clouds in the southwest. Since they only lived about five miles from the restaurant, they weren't particularly concerned even though earlier in the day, the Fobers had heard reports about a deadly F-4 tornado that ripped through Enterprise, Ala., about 120 miles south of Columbus.

The devastating tornado had packed winds of up to 200 mph. Eight high school students and one Enterprise woman were killed there, and more than 700 businesses and homes were damaged or destroyed. All told, 20 people died from this twister, which traveled through Alabama, Georgia and Missouri.

However, the Fobers were unaware of any impending danger, other than a possible tornado watch, as they got in their Ford Explorer for the short trip home, said Fober, who is a program manager, Soldier Requirements Division, Maneuver Center of Excellence, Fort Benning, Ga.

As he stopped at a traffic light near a drugstore, the wind suddenly picked up, and they could feel it buffeting the Explorer. Then Fober turned at the intersection and into a tornado.

“As soon as I turned the corner, I could just see a big wall of debris coming toward us – I didn’t see a funnel,” he said. “At that point, I was trying to turn into a drugstore parking lot to the right, but I was being pulled toward the left, and we did about a 360 (degree turn).”

The pressure from the twister broke out all the windows in their vehicle except the windshield, which was cracked by debris. As quickly as it struck, it was over, Fober said.

“Then the rain was coming in, and I pulled into the parking lot and drove home,” he said.

It was raining when they arrived, but the tornado missed their home.

The storm which hit Columbus that day was determined to be an F-2 tornado. It also touched down in Phenix City, Ala., adjacent to Columbus, and its path through those areas was 10.3 miles long. The twister’s path in Enterprise was 2.4 miles.

Looking back, Fober advised taking tornado watches and warnings seriously.

“Tornadoes are very powerful, and if there is a possibility of one nearby, people shouldn’t move around in it,” he said. “If someone sees the sky is unusually dark, something is coming, so stay out of it.”

People nationwide have experienced tornadic winds such as the ones produced by this twister. The U.S. averages annually about 800 tornadoes that cause about 80 deaths and more than 1,500 injuries, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Most tornadoes average about 30-70 mph, but can reach wind speeds of 250 mph or more and can be violently destructive to people and property, according to National Weather Service. When a tornado warning or watch is issued, people should look for a rotating column of air extending from a thunderstorm to the ground.

Tornadoes can occur any time, any place, but are most prevalent in the southern U.S. from March-May and in northern states during the summer. No particular area is safe from tornadoes. Although tornadoes are generally predictable in the paths they take, moving from southwest to northeast, they can move in any direction.

If a tornado is suspected, listen to radio and television weather alerts for the following:

- **Tornado Watch:** Tornadoes are possible in areas mentioned. Remain alert for approaching storms.
- **Tornado Warning:** A tornado has been sighted or indicated by weather radar. If a tornado warning is issued for a designated area and the sky becomes threatening, people living there should move to a pre-designated place of safety.

- **Severe Thunderstorm Watch:** Severe thunderstorms are possible in the area designated.
- **Severe Thunderstorm Warning:** Severe thunderstorms are occurring.

In addition to the above conditions, other dangers often accompany tornadoes and thunderstorms to include flash floods, lightning, damaging straight-line winds and hail. For more information about tornadoes, visit <http://www.weather.gov/>.

### **Flash Floods**

Although floods are one of the most common hazards in the U.S. and usually develop slowly after a lot of rain, flash floods can occur quickly without any visible signs of rain, according to the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Flash floods are usually walls of water that carry rocks, mud and other debris and can sweep away people, vegetation, property and other items.

People in every state can be affected, especially those who live or work in low-lying areas, near water or downstream from a dam, FEMA reported. Even small streams, gullies, creeks, culverts, dry streambeds or low-lying ground can flood. For more information about flash floods, visit <http://www.fema.gov/>.

### **Lightning**

Lightning may never strike twice, according to a popular saying, but it is usually fatal when it strikes people. In 2010, a junior ROTC graduate was attending an invitational training session when she was struck by lightning while evacuating to a shelter in the training area, according to data obtained from the U.S. Army Combat Readiness/Safety Center. She later died.

In the U.S., about 58 people are killed by lightning annually, according to NWS. One thing to keep in mind about lightning is no one outside is safe from it. Anyone who can hear thunder can be struck by lightning and should head immediately to safe shelter until at least 30 minutes after they hear the last clap of thunder. A safe shelter is defined as a substantial building or inside an enclosed, metal-topped vehicle.

Other tips include: never use a tree, cliff or rocky overhang for shelter; never lie flat on the ground; stay off hills, mountain ridges, peaks or any elevated area; and stay away from bodies of water and any objects that can conduct electricity such as barbed-wire fences, windmills and power lines, according to NWS.

When indoors, NWS suggests staying away from windows, doors, porches, sinks, baths and faucets; staying off telephones with cords, electrical equipment and computers; and do not lie on concrete floors or lean against concrete walls.

For more information about lightning, visit <http://www.weather.gov/>.

## **Hurricanes**

Hurricane and typhoon are regional names for tropical cyclones, which are basically non-frontal, low-pressure systems over tropical or sub-tropical waters with organized thunderstorm activity, according to the National Hurricane Center. Tornadic winds can reach much higher speeds than hurricane winds, but hurricanes can cause more damage by themselves and throughout a season because of their size, duration and the ways they can damage property.

Tornadoes are usually a mile or less in diameter and last minutes compared to hurricanes, which can have eye walls (the area that surrounds the eye and produces damaging winds and rainfall) that are 10 miles wide, last for hours and cause storm surge, heavy rain and wind impacts.

To prepare, NHC advises to have the following:

- Family plan – A family plan can include a safe room in the home or evacuation shelter and escape route away from affected areas, out-of-state contact addresses and telephone numbers of friends or relatives, emergency telephone numbers, insurance information, non-perishable emergency supplies, prescription medications, first aid and information on cardiopulmonary resuscitation.
- Disaster supply kit – It is recommended these include water, food for three to seven days, blankets, seasonal clothing, toiletries and hygiene supplies, special supplies for babies and elderly people, flashlight with batteries and radio or NOAA weather radio with batteries. For a complete list, visit <http://www.nhc.noaa.gov/>.
- Place to Go – Have a plan and a place to go during hurricanes. If told to evacuate, do not delay. Part of the plan should include arrangements to stay with friends or relatives or hotel reservations in advance at the destination. In the event friends, relatives or hotels cannot provide safe havens, locate an emergency evacuation shelter at the destination well in advance of departure.

- Secure the home – Protect the home from wind and obtain flood insurance.
- Pet plan – Pet owners should remember to take their pets when evacuating. In preparation, they should make sure pets are up to date on vaccinations and have proper paperwork because shelters may require proof. Owners should control their pets with leashes and collars with ID tags and have current photos of their pets. They also should ensure pet carriers are the right size for each pet.

For more information about hurricanes, visit <http://www.nhc.noaa.gov>.



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